

**LAUNCH OF COOPER'S CREEK
GIPPSLAND
THE TREVISANI**

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I am delighted to have the opportunity to launch Diana's second book, Cooper's Creek. It is also appropriate as Diana did in her book, where she acknowledged the Kulin and Kurnai nations, that I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land of which we meet this evening, the Warunjeree People.

Diana, a child of Treviso and a keen student of history, has made a wonderful contribution to the preservation of Italian heritage in Australia through Cooper's Creek.

The book is also a ringing endorsement of the success of Multiculturalism, whilst also pointing to the tensions experienced by Italians when they first settled in Australia.

Interestingly these same tensions are now experienced by Italians in Treviso with the settlement in Italy of migrants from countries such as Africa. How the wheel turns in a global environment.

On reading the book, my mind boggled at the research undertaken by Diana, the hundreds of people interviewed, the rich collection of photographs assembled and the myriad of topics undertaken.

As the outset, the book takes us on a tour from the Province of Treviso to Cooper's Creek in Gippsland.

It deals with the history and settlement of Cooper's Creek and Jubilee in the Gippsland region near Walhalla and Traralgon of a cluster of hard working decent men from the Treviso region in Northern Italy near Veneto.

Today Cooper's Creek has a population of four but from the 1920's to the 1950's it gave the men of Treviso a fresh start in life.

Australia was lucky, as America closed its borders, when all these men simply wanted was to escape the ravages and disappointment of Work War I and the Great Depression.

Australia gave them opportunity and they have never forgotten it. Diana makes that point where she states that:

“The Trevisani people consider work as extremely important, it gives a sense of identity, a strong part of their culture, as was family life.” (Page 95)

Yes, family life and their commitment to Catholicism was important, but these men and their families also suffered.

Families were left in Italy, some never to be re-united as the men laboured to earn enough to send money back home to feed and clothe their families and eventually pay their passage to Australia.

Work, cultural events and the church gave a sense of purpose to the community from the annual pig making, to the marriages, baptisms and funerals.

On arrival in Australia, Diana vividly describes how life was also difficult for the women, where she states:

“The women felt a sense of loss, the inability to practice their culture and way of life, no church and no cemetery, no Saint’s days, no family and very few other women.” (Page 119)

No wonder the commitment to work, the family and the paesani were, in an alien country, so strong.

We should also not forget that some of these men came to Australia not just for economic opportunity but also for political reasons.

Some had agitated for land rights to no avail in Italy whilst others had fled from Mussolini’s Government.

Accordingly some of these men were industrial activists in Australian cane fields agitating for non-racial and fair employment.

They were supporters of the Matteotti Club near Trades Hall, readers of la Riscossa and visitors to the anti-Fascist club, Casa d’Italia.

No wonder the Australian Government’s World War II internment policy and restrictions of civilians of Italian background irritated them.

But these people as Diana says in her conclusion:

“shared true survival skills to seek opportunities wherever they could, to try harder and seek new ways to deal with, at times difficult situations.” (Page 199)

The end of World War II saw Ben Chifley and Arthur Calwell restarting migration with vigour and the closure of the White Rock Limestone Company.

The pattern of cluster settlement had already advanced from Cooper's Creek to Melbourne, especially the northern suburbs of Thornbury, Northcote and Preston. The multitude of factories provided work in Melbourne and the suburbs, notably GMH and International Harvester. Italians were also attracted to the building industry as many were experienced in concreting and carpentry. Many went on to projects such as road and dam construction.

Throughout the book Diana's compassion for ordinary working people and their families is the theme that rings true. It is about community.

The province of Treviso has been good to Australia, yielding up its young men and women to create a close knit community but also an Australia that is more tolerant and multicultural.

As Diana states on the last page of her book:

“Life as migrants in Australia's bush was initially extremely hard, but their decision to migrate and re-establish themselves was successful for the Trevisani. This is evident by their adult children, grandchildren and great grandchildren who are now living as part of a multicultural society, contributing to the overall fabric of Australia's people.”

Diana, congratulations, Cooper's Creek is fittingly dedicated to your parents Maria and Giovanni.

Cooper's Creek preserves for posterity the struggles by Italian migrants to successfully carve out a new opportunity in Australia.

It is my pleasure to launch Cooper's Creek and there are appropriately, two versions an Italian and an English one.

Enjoy the book, it has whetted my appetite, I now look forward to visiting Cooper's Creek, Jubilee and Treviso.